

James, William. *Essays of Faith and Morals*, “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings.” Edited by Ralph Barton Perry. Cleveland, Ohio: The World Publishing Company, 1962.

William James (1842-1910), brother of novelist Henry James, taught physiology, psychology, and philosophy at Harvard University. His philosophical pragmatism and thoroughgoing empiricism deeply influenced subsequent American philosophy.

Our judgments depend upon the feelings they create in us. All humans are unable to perceive the feelings that the judgments of others create in them. We know our own feelings. Those of others are a mystery, and our judgments about this interiority of others are usually stupid, unjust, and false. When life creates eagerness in a person, that person finds her life significant.

This truth lies in the thought of many writers: Robert Louis Stevenson, Josiah Royce, Emerson, Wordsworth, Shelley, Richard Jeffries, Walt Whitman, Schopenhauer, Benvenuto Cellini, Tolstoy, and W. H. Hudson.

Our day-to-day preoccupations deafen us to the variety of worth others experience. It is necessarily so. Humans would not be human if they saw things on the broad canvas of the universe. Ideas cram our minds. Thinking them, we miss life’s simple joys and goods. The only repair possible is to retreat to the depth of primitivism.

The conclusion is this: one must not judge another’s existence to be meaningless. We must, rather, tolerate the life of those who do us no harm. Their life may be incomprehensible to us. But no person knows all of truth and goodness. Our task is to grasp our own possibilities. We must leave those of others to them.